



Siblings by **LizzySong**

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Summary: Over the months following the night El closed the gate, Steve has become an honorary big brother to all of the kids — especially Max. So when he needs a little help, Max decides it's her turn to take care of him.

Siblings

Author's Note: I'm back on a Stranger Things kick! It feels good to be writing for these characters again (and I promise I'll finish Timing is Everything eventually — you've all been so amazingly patient. I promise I haven't forgotten), but in the meantime I hope you enjoy this oneshot!

Until the next fic!

-LizzySong

It had become something of a routine now. Max waiting for Steve in front of the school, Steve pulling up at exactly 3:10 on the dot, usually going back to his house or the arcade until Max's mother would get off from work and Steve would drop Max off at home.

It had been Steve's idea as a way for Max to avoid her brother as much as possible. He'd felt protective of her, as well as the rest of the party, after the night El closed the gate, and Max gratefully accepted the brotherly gesture.

Usually the rest of the group would join them, but today it was just Max, standing alone and waiting for the boy who she had begun to see as her brother.

She'd been waiting longer than she should have been, she realized, when she looked at her watch which read: 3:15.

Steve was never late to pick her up, so this worried her just a little. It worried her more when he finally did pull up at 3:20 — ten minutes late meant something had to be wrong.

She tossed her backpack and skateboard into the backseat before joining Steve in the front of the car.

"Sorry I'm late I had to..." he trailed off and Max gave him a concerned look.

"Had to what?" she asked and he shook his head slightly.

"Never mind. You ready to go?"

"Yeah, I'm ready."

They drove in silence for a few minutes before Max spoke again, "...You don't look so good, you know."

"Well that's a great thing to say to a guy. I feel so special!" He gave her a joking smile but the girl's look of concern didn't change.

"No, I mean like, you look sick. Are you okay?"

"I'm fine. Practice just went long today. Didn't have time to shower after."

She gave him a slightly questioning look, but decided to let the subject go for now.

They drove in silence again for some time, which was something else that didn't seem quite right to Max. Steve wasn't the most talkative person she knew — that was Dustin — but he was never this quiet. He usually at least had the radio on.

She gave him occasional side glances and noticed that he was gripping the steering wheel so tightly that his knuckles were white. Not to mention the sheen of sweat covering his face, which was much paler than it should have been, and his suspiciously controlled breathing.

"...Are you sure you're okay?" Max said eventually, "'Cause you really don't look good."

"Max, I told you; I'm fine," he said with a sigh — which threw off his carefully controlled breathing pattern and brought with it a bout of nausea.

He gripped the steering wheel a little tighter and continued driving for another minute before abruptly pulling over to the side of the road and putting the car in park before throwing open the door and leaning out of the car to vomit.

"Oh my god!" Max said, reaching over to place a hand on his upper

back.

This lasted for a couple minutes before Steve finally sat back in his seat, breathing heavily, with a soft groan of "Shit..."

"...Do you want me to drive?" Max asked, her voice filled with concern.

"No. I think that'll just make it worse. ...And how many mail boxes did you take out last time?" He added with a pointed, if tired, look.

"Just one!"

"The answer should be zero. And we're almost there — I'll be okay at least long enough to get home."

"You sure?"

"Yeah. Just... give me a minute."

By the time they made it to the house, Max thought Steve might faint at any moment. He was even paler than before and his hands were shaking slightly as he turned off the ignition.

"...Do you need help like... walking?" She wasn't used to seeing her surrogate brother in such a vulnerable state and it made her feel a little awkward.

Evidently he felt the same way as he tried to regain his composure, getting out of the car with a quiet groan. "No; I'll be okay."

"You're definitely not okay," Max said as she got out of the car and grabbed her backpack from the backseat.

"Just come on." Steve jingled the keys and went up the walkway to his front door, Max following close behind him.

Steve dropped his keys on the small table next to the front door and made his way over to the sofa, lying down — carefully so as not to make his nausea worse.

"You're not gonna keep trying to tell me you're fine?" Max asked,

dropping her backpack by the door and walking over to him.

"You just saw me puke my guts out on the side of the road; would you really believe me if I said I was fine?"

"Fair enough." She stared at the miserable teenager for another few moments before leaving the room with an "I'll be right back."

She returned nearly ten minutes later with a small trash can from the downstairs bathroom, a bottle of medicine she'd found in the bathroom medicine cabinet, a sleeve of saltines, and a can of 7Up which she'd found after rummaging through the kitchen for several minutes.

"...What's all this?" Steve asked, looking up at the girl with confusion when she placed the items on the coffee table in front of the couch — except for the trash can, which she put on the floor directly in front of him.

"Well that's for you to puke in so you don't end up puking on me," she replied, pointing to the trash can, "and the rest is to hopefully stop you from puking at all."

"Thanks, kid. ...Can you maybe stop saying the word 'puke' though?"

"Yeah, sorry," Max said as she sat down on the floor in front of the sofa.

"How'd you know to get all this stuff, anyway?"

"Believe it or not, I've actually gotten sick before. ...And this is what my dad always did for me when I was feeling like crap."

She looked away from the older teen then, and he knew he was in uncharted territory. Max had never talked about her father with him before, other than when she mentioned he was still in California.

"...Sounds like he's a good dad."

"Yeah... he is." She sniffled and roughly wiped her eyes with her sleeve. Steve placed a comforting hand on her shoulder and she immediately leaned over, wrapping her arms around his neck and

burying her face in his shoulder.

They stayed like that for about a minute before Steve pushed her aside and quickly grabbed the trash can.

"Shit..." he said with a soft groan when he'd finished retching. "Sorry."

"Don't apologize. You didn't puke on me, so we're good. ...You should drink some of this, though," Max said, offering the can of soda to the older teenager. "If you get too dehydrated I'm gonna have to take you to the hospital — and I know how you feel about my driving."

"Thanks," he said, taking the drink and choosing to ignore what she'd said about her driving. He didn't feel like having that argument again right now.

"You wanna watch a movie or something?" Max asked after Steve had taken a couple sips of the soda and managed to keep it down.

"Sure," he said, slowly lying back down, "put on whatever you want. Videos are over there," he added with a vague gesture to the cupboard next to the television set.

Max rummaged through it for several minutes before deciding on "Poltergeist" and moving back over to her spot in front of the sofa.

After fighting inter dimensional monsters, the thought of a poltergeist wasn't as frightening as it once was, and the two couldn't help but make comments that reflected this fact throughout the duration of the film.

"Why would you set up a freaky clown doll to watch you while you sleep?"

"All it did was stack some chairs. What, is gonna do the dishes next?"

"El could do that."

"What kind of a mother is actually excited that her house is haunted?"

"That's supposed to be ectoplasm, right? So why is it red? Is it like, mixed with blood or something?"

"So just don't build a house on top of a graveyard? Max remind me of this movie if I ever tell you I want to build a house on top of a graveyard."

"Okay."

Near the end of the movie Steve dozed off, much to Max's relief as she knew he must be exhausted. She got a blanket from the back of the couch and draped it over him, careful not to wake him as she did so.

She wondered if there would be anyone around to take care of him over the weekend, seeing as his parents were always gone, and briefly considered calling Hopper before deciding that seeing as she was already here, she may as well just stay the night.

She dialed her home number, praying that her mother, and not Billy, would pick up.

Steve stirred a little and noticed that Max had left her spot on the floor. He was anxious for a moment before he heard her voice from the kitchen.

"I'm just going to spend the night at a friend's house. Yeah, tonight and then probably most of tomorrow. I'll call if you have to pick me up. Don't worry, I'll be fine."

She hung up the phone and made her way back to the living room.

"Is Lucas coming to pick you up or something?"

"...No. Why would he?"

"You said you were staying at a friend's house. I figured that meant Lucas."

"No," Max said, sitting down on the floor again, "I'm staying here. With you. You're the friend. I really don't think you should be left alone like this — I don't want you to choke on your own vomit or something."

Steve laughed slightly, surprised by the girl's eagerness to help him.

He would do anything to help her and any of the other kids — he'd proven that when he'd fought Billy and gone into the upside down with them — but he didn't expect any of them to help him like this.

"...You know you don't have to take care of me. I promise I'll live."

"I either have to stay here, or go home and deal with Billy. And I'd rather spend my time with someone who actually acts like a brother — even if I have to see you puke a few times."

Her eyes widened when she realized what she had said. She hadn't told him that she saw him as a brother, afraid that he'd be uncomfortable.

He just gave her a smile, a little surprised, but happy. "And I'd rather spend my time with someone who acts like a sister."

Max relaxed a little and returned Steve's smile before turning and resting her back against the couch, comforted by the fact that he saw her as a younger sister just as she saw him as a brother.

The rest of the evening was spent watching movies as Steve drifted in and out of sleep, or was occasionally forced to eat saltines or drink something by Max with a worried-masked-by-irritation "It's for your own good."

At one point Max's walkie-talkie (given to her by Lucas) crackled loudly with Dustin's voice coming through, "Max? Max, come in. Max!"

"Shit!" Max whispered harshly to herself as she glanced at the sleeping teenager who had begun to stir slightly at the sound of the walkie-talkie.

"Max, come in!" Dustin's voice came through again, louder than before.

She quickly stood up and grabbed her backpack, running to another room before she took out the device. "What?!" she whispered into the receiver.

"We're going to the arcade. Can you and Steve meet us there?"

"No."

"What? Why not?"

"Cause Steve's really sick. He threw up like three times since he picked me up and he's sleeping on the couch right now. —You almost woke him up, by the way."

"...Shit," the boy sounded worried now, "Do you want us to come over? Does he need help?"

"No, I think having everyone here would just stress him out, and I'm gonna stay here tonight in case he needs help."

"Are you sure? 'Cause we could call Mrs. Byers or Hopper and—"

"—We'll be fine. Just go to the arcade — and if you beat my high score on Dig Dug I will kill you."

"Challenge accepted."

"I hate you."

"Well I think you're great."

Max rolled her eyes, "Tell Lucas to call me later, okay?"

"Yeah. And if you guys need any help—"

"—I'll let you know. Don't worry."

"Good. Take care of him, okay?"

"He's gonna be fine. I gotta go, okay?"

"Okay."

"Over and out."

"Over and out." She sighed and returned the device to her backpack before making her way back to the living room.

She settled herself back on her spot in front of the couch and felt a

tired hand ruffle her hair. "Thanks..." Steve muttered, and Max couldn't help but smile.

"Any time."

"...You're a good sister."

"...You're a good brother, too."

Max knew the boy was more than half asleep and definitely not coherent, which meant he probably wouldn't remember this when he got better, but that didn't matter. Steve thought of her as a sister, and for the first time since she'd moved to Hawkins, she felt at home.